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California's Reader Privacy Act Signed into Law

Sacramento, CA – California Governor Jerry Brown has signed the Reader Privacy Act, updating reader privacy law to cover new technologies like electronic books and online book services as well as local bookstores.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were sponsors of the bill, authored by California State Senator Leland Yee. It had support from Google, TechNet and the Consumer Federation of California,

along with the Internet Archive, City Lights Bookstore, and award-winning authors Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman. The Reader Privacy Act will become law on January 1, and will establish privacy protections for book purchases similar to long-established privacy laws for library records.

"This is great news for Californians, updating their privacy for the 21st Century," said EFF Legal Director Cindy Cohn. "The Reader Privacy Act will help Californians protect their personal information whether they use new digital book services or their corner bookstore."

Reading choices reveal intimate facts about our lives, from our political and religious beliefs to our health concerns. Digital books and book services can paint an even more detailed picture -- including books browsed but not read, particular pages viewed, how long spent on each page, and any electronic notes made by the reader. Without strong privacy protections like the ones in the Reader Privacy Act, reading records can be too easily targeted by government scrutiny as well as exposed in legal proceedings like divorce cases and custody battles.

"California should be a leader in ensuring that upgraded technology does not mean downgraded privacy," said Valerie Small Navarro, Legislative Advocate with the ACLU's California affiliates. "We should be able to read about anything from politics, to religion, to health without worrying that the government might be looking over our shoulder."

"California law was completely inadequate when it came to protecting one's privacy for book purchases, especially for online shopping and electronic books," said Yee. "Individuals should be free to buy books without fear of government intrusion and witch hunts. If law enforcement has reason to suspect wrongdoing, they should obtain a court order for such information."

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